DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 292 412 HE 021 278

AUTHOR Baldwin, Roger G.
TITLE Faculty Vitality: Extending the Concept Beyond the Research University. ASHE Annual Meeting Paper.
PUB DATE Nov 87
NOTE 29p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (Baltimore, MD, November 21-24, 1987).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Faculty; *Evaluation Criteria; Faculty Evaluation; Higher Education; Leadership; *Professional Recognition; *Small Colleges; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Effectiveness
IDENTIFIERS *ASHE Annual Meeting

ABSTRACT

Individual and institutional/environmental factors that distinguish "vital" professors from a "representative" group of their colleagues were investigated. Of concern was whether the faculty vitality concept discriminates among professors in meaningful ways (i.e., regarding their professional attitudes, practices, achievements). The focus was professors in small liberal arts colleges. The study is based on research conducted at the University of Minnesota by Clark and Corcoran. The faculty vitality concept is applied in a distinctive type of institution where the vital professor may be a stimulating teacher or a faculty leader but not necessarily a prolific scholar. Campus administrators and faculty offered names of full professors they regarded as vital, based on a broad definition. A comparison group of "representative" full professors was also identified. Participants were 50 "vital" and 40 "representative" professors from four respected private institutions in the Southeast. A structured personal interview employing mostly open-ended questions was used to gather data. A coding scheme was developed from the interview responses to help identify patterns, themes, attributes, and experiences that distinguish vital and representative faculty. The findings and implications for research and practice are considered. Included are 14 references. (SW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED292412

FACULTY VITALITY:

EXTENDING THE CONCEPT BEYOND THE RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

Roger G. Baldwin
College of William and Mary

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Roger G. Baldwin

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

Presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Baltimore, Maryland, November 1987.

HE021 27p

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ASHE
ASSOCIATION
FOR THE
STUDY OF
HIGHER EDUCATION

Texas A&M University
Department of Educational
Administration
College Station, TX 77843
(409) 845-0393

This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the Sheraton Inner Harbor Hotel in Baltimore, Maryland, November 21-24, 1987. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

Introduction and Objectives

The objective of this qualitative exploratory study is to identify systematically factors (individual and institutional/environmental) that distinguish "vital" professors from a "representative" group of their colleagues. A steady stream of reports in the popular media (e.g., The New York Times, "The Troubled Faculty", 1985) as well as higher education literature (e.g., Bowen and Schuster, American Professors: A National Resource Imperiled, 1986; Boyer, College: The Undergraduate Experience in America, 1987) express concern over the state of faculty vitality nationwide. Worry is widespread that an aging, immobile, discipline-bound professoriate will not be able to provide the state-of-the-art teaching and research necessary for the United States to remain "competitive," the new buzz word in business, government, and education sectors.

Fundamentally, this study tests whether the faculty vitality concept discriminates among professors in meaningful ways (i.e., regarding their professional attitudes, practices, achievements). The study attempts to uncover factors that foster and sustain vitality among professors in small liberal arts colleges. It builds upon faculty vitality research (Clark and Corcoran, 1985) conducted at the University of Minnesota, a prototypic research university. This study applies the faculty vitality concept in a distinctive type of higher education institution where the vital professor may be a stimulating teacher or a faculty leader but not necessarily a prolific scholar.

Theoretical Perspectives

Research and theory on organizational behavior (Kanter, 1977; 1979; Peters and Waterman, 1982) and career development (Hall and Nougaim, 1968;

Super, 1957) shed some light on the faculty vitality phenomenon. Kanter suggests that environmental conditions, especially opportunities for career growth and advancement, influence the amount of effort employees exert and the degree of work commitment they feel. She compares the energetic, job involved behavior of "moving" workers (those who are learning and advancing professionally) with the low morale and limited productivity of disengaged, professionally "stuck" individuals (those who are no longer learning on the job or advancing in rank).

Career development theory suggests that workers in many fields eventually reach a less goal directed, less creative career plateau following an initial period of professional growth. This phenomenon certainly appears to be present within the academic profession. Some faculty members remain professionally active and vital to the end of their careers. Others seem to plateau long before retirement and become less innovative and less productive. According to Bardwick (1986), most people plateau at some point in their work lives. For many, a career plateau becomes a permanent state, characterized by routine responsibilities, diminished enthusiasm, and few new creative initiatives. For others, however, a plateau represents only a temporary hiatus before stimulating new career goals and tasks are identified.

An important question for higher education is, "What distinguishes professors who remain vital from those who plateau or in some way reduce their professional momentum? In effect, colleges and universities need to learn how vital professors differ from their less dynamic colleagues.

Faculty vitality research, however, is in an embryonic stage of development. According to Clark, Boyer, and Corcoran (1985) faculty vitality is a

widely used but imprecise term. It is not clear what faculty vitality is or what fosters it. Clark, Boyer, and Corcoran assert that faculty vitality is a qualitative phenomenon, more than simple productivity (e.g., number of students taught or articles published). They also suggest that faculty vitality is a contextual phenomenon that varies in different institutional settings. In other words, there is no such thing as the vital professor. A vital professor in a research university differs in significant ways from a vital professor in a liberal arts or community college.

Many attempts to explain faculty behavior and productivity (see especially Finkelstein, 1984 and Creswell, 1985) have occurred. To date, however, no theory of faculty vitality exists in the higher education literature (Clark et. al., 1985). To develop a theoretical model of faculty vitality, the phenomenon must be studied in a variety of forms and a range of institutional contexts, including the undergraduate liberal arts college.

Method and Data Sources

Clark and Corcoran (1985) assert that the qualitative research paradigm is appropriate for faculty vitality studies due to the complexities of the vitality concept. For this study, a structured personal interview employing mostly open-ended questions was developed to gather data. Items concerned the interests, activities, satisfactions, goals, working conditions, faculty development opportunities, professional achievements, and colleague relationships of college professors.

Interview participants were selected from four respected private higher education institutions in the Southeast. Each is primarily an undergraduate liberal arts college, although three offer limited advanced degree programs.

Only full professors beyond all the structural hurdles of the academic profession (tenure, promotion in rank) were eligible to participate. The intent was to limit the influence extrinsically imposed career goals might have on the interview responses. Interview subjects were identified in a three stage process. On the various campuses administrators and faculty members with an institution-wide perspective offered the names of full professors they regarded as vital. Nominations were based on a broad definition of a vital professor (see Appendix). In essence, a vital professor was defined as a "star performer" in those areas that his or her institution most prizes (Schuster, 1986). A faculty member had to be cited by at least two persons in order to be placed in the vital category. A comparison group of "representative" full professors stratified by academic area (arts, humanities, natural sciences, social sciences) was also identified after the vital professors were removed from the pool of eligible full professors.

Fifty interviews with professors in the vital category and 40 interviews with professors in the representative category were conducted. Twenty-eight persons (11 vital, 17 representative) either declined or were unable to participate. Table 1 describes the distribution of the sample by institution. Table 2 presents the sample's distribution by academic field.

A coding scheme was inductively developed from the interview responses to aid with the identification of patterns, themes, attributes, and experiences that distinguish between vital and representative faculty groups. Response frequencies, percentages and means were calculated where appropriate and representative quotes from the interviews that illustrate the major descriptive findings were identified. More thorough content analysis of the interviews is continuing.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Findings

Tabulation of interview responses reveals an interesting mix of similarities and differences within the total faculty group. Professors as a whole shared many of the same professional interests and experiences. Yet noteworthy differences between the vital and representative groups emerge.

Common Faculty Interests, Attributes, and Experiences

Members of the two groups showed a remarkable degree of consensus concerning their professional interests. Table 3 reveals that the order of mean interest ratings for the vital and representative groups was virtually identical. Both agree that the teaching is their primary interest followed

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

by research and scholarship, outside professional activities and service, and administrative and institutional service. This ranking is consistent with the primary mission of the institutions employing these professors.

TABLE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE BY INSTITUTION

	Vital	Representative	Total
College A	7	8	15
College B	5	10	15
College C	23	10	33
College D	15	12	27
Total	50	40	90

TABLE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE BY DISCIPLINARY FIELD

	Vital	Representative	Total
Arts	2	4	6
Humanities	16	10	26
Natural Sciences	13	16	29
Social Sciences	19	10	29
Total	50	40	90

TABLE 3: MEAN RATINGS OF PROFESSORS' PRIMARY PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS
(1 = greatest interest; 5 = lowest interest)

	Vital	Representative	Total
	n = 50	n = 40	n = 90
Instruction and related activities	1.3	1.3	1.3
Research and scholarly work	2.0	2.3	2.2
Administrative or other institutional service	3.5	3.4	3.5
Outside professional activities and service	3.1	3.1	3.1

Table 4 indicates that the professors studied also shared several professional attributes, attitudes, and activities. Many in the vital and

INSERT TABLE 4 HERE

representative categories cited comparable professional strengths such as their teaching skills, knowledge of their fields, and rapport with students. The two groups also appear to derive satisfaction and dissatisfaction from some of the same sources. Comparable percentages of vital and representative faculty cited students and autonomy as sources of satisfaction and committee duties, routine aspects of academic work, and working conditions as sources of discontent. Reflecting the teaching orientation of their institutions, large numbers in both groups mentioned that they had designed and taught a new course during the past five years.

Factors Distinguishing Vital From Representative Professors

Activities and Perceptions. Understandably, professors share much in common. Bowen and Schuster (1986) conclude from their nationwide study of the professoriate that "despite the variety that exists in academe, it is appropriate for many purposes to treat the professoriate as a closely knit social group and not merely as a collection of disparate individuals or unrelated small groups" (p. 13). Yet this study reveals an intriguing set of variables distinguishing vital professors from their representative counterparts.

Table 5, for example, illustrates the different time use patterns of members of the two groups. Vital professors' estimates of their typical

TABLE 4: FACTORS COMMON AMONG "VITAL" AND "REPRESENTATIVE" FACULTY

	Vital		Representative		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Primary Professional Strengths:						
Teaching	27	54	22	55	49	54
Knowledge, Competence in Field	20	40	18	45	38	42
Rapport with students, Colleagues	15	30	11	27	26	30
Sources of Career Satisfaction:						
Students	40	80	34	85	74	82
Autonomy	8	16	9	22	17	19
Sources of Career Dissatisfaction:						
Committees, meetings, administrative duties	29	58	20	50	49	54
Grading, routine aspects of academic work	20	40	12	30	32	36
Working conditions, environment	12	24	8	20	20	22
Taught new course in past five years	43	86	31	77	74	82

INSERT TABLE 5 HERE

work week average over five hours longer than the mean estimate of representative faculty members. Even more revealing is the way in which the two groups divide their professional time. Table 5 indicates that, in general, professors in the study devote the majority of their time to instruction. But members of the representative group spend an average of nearly 10 percent more time in teaching and teaching related activities than do those in the vital category. In contrast, those in the vital group consistently invested larger portions of their time in other professional roles (e.g., research, administrative and institutional service, outside professional activities and service) than did their representative counterparts. These findings suggest that vital professors work longer hours than a stratified sample of their colleagues. Perhaps more importantly, the findings reveal that the two groups work differently, with the vital professors leading more diversified and more balanced work lives.

Table 6 presents a rich array of professional experiences and achievements that further distinguish representative professors from their vital colleagues. Responses to questions about their activities over the

INSERT TABLE 6 HERE

past five years reveals that vital professors are consistently more professionally active and productive. Compared to the representative group,

TABLE 5: TIME COMMITTED TO FACULTY ROLES

	Vital	Representative	Total
Mean hours worked per week	54.5	49.2	52.3
Mean Percentage of average work week devoted to:			
Instruction and instruction related activities	54.0	63.9	58.2
Research and scholarly work	21.1	14.6	18.3
Administrative and institutional service	15.1	11.9	13.8
Outside professional activities and service	9.4	9.2	9.3

TABLE 6: ACTIVITIES, ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERCEPTIONS THAT DISTINGUISH BETWEEN VITAL AND REPRESENTATIVE FACULTY MEMBERS

	Vital		Representative		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
During the last five years:						
-Presented a paper or served on a panel	39	78	24	60	63	70
-Served as paid consultant	32	64	13	32	45	50
-Published in academic or professional journals	39	78	22	55	61	68
-Applied for research or special project funding	37	74	20	50	57	63
Collaborate with colleagues in teaching or research activities	39	78	20	50	59	66
Taken professional risks, non-traditional activities	27	54	12	30	39	43
Made significant change in roles or responsibilities	33	66	14	35	47	52
Felt blocked or stuck professionally	22	44	25	62	47	52
Considered a major career change	23	46	23	57	46	51

substantially higher percentages of the vital faculty indicated that they had made presentations at professional meetings, served as paid consultants, published, and applied for funding for research or special educational projects. In addition, the average number of books written by vital faculty (Mean 1.3, Median 1.0) was notably greater than the average for representative professors (Mean .9, Median 0.0).

Table 6 also suggests that the two groups approach their professional roles differently and work in somewhat different ways. A majority in both categories indicated that they occasionally work with colleagues in teaching or research activities. However, a substantially larger percentage of vital professors (more than three of every four) stated that they sometimes collaborate with colleagues in activities such as team teaching, cooperative research, and joint authorship. The benefits of collaboration were aptly described by a vital sociology professor: "Collaboration...is more fun and more productive than working alone."

More vital than representative professors also indicted that they had taken professional risks or engaged in innovative or non-traditional professional activities during their careers. Establishing new academic programs, experimenting with teaching strategies, and moving into interdisciplinary fields were among the steps professors took to add variety and excitement to their work lives. A vital English teacher, for example, described the risk of starting a film program when English departments "often feel film is lightweight stuff." A creative Spanish professor talked with enthusiasm about his off beat efforts (including in-class Aztec sacrifices) to enliven the learning process. It appears that faculty members as well as students

benefit from occasional diversions from the academic status quo.

A question about significant changes in professional roles and responsibilities reveals a similar response pattern. A larger portion of the vital than the representative faculty group indicated that they had at some point revised their work roles in major ways. Some had worked in administration or outside of higher education. Others had begun teaching full-time or part-time in new subject areas where they had developed an interest and some expertise. Vital professors seemed to find many ways to expand their work lives and make room for professional growth. Some stimulating changes were, in essence, quite natural career progressions. For example, a geology professor changed his primary professional emphasis from teaching to research and his speciality from sedimentary rocks to the origins of mountain systems. More profound changes were described by a religion professor who now teaches journalism and applied ethics and a physics professor who had become an associate dean, astronomer, and professor of mathematics. The latter individual went into administrative work when he "wanted to bring some fresh air into [his] career." Each of his career transitions, he observed, had "a dimension of the need for change in it." This study suggests that many professors on occasion experience a desire to revise their careers in some meaningful fashion. Consistent with the patterns reported above, however, the findings suggest that vital professors' careers are typically more dynamic and multifaceted than the careers of many representative faculty.

The contrasting nature of the two groups of professors is further illustrated by their feelings toward their careers. Table 6 shows that many professors have at some point felt blocked or stuck professionally, that they

were no longer stimulated by their work or lacked opportunities to advance. "You hate to see yourself reaching a plateau," observed a psychology professor. "You want to continue to be challenged." The data indicate, however, that this experience has occurred to more representative than vital participants in this study. Less than half of the vital faculty indicated that they had felt stuck; whereas 62 percent of the representative group acknowledged such a perception. The proportions who had considered a major career change parallel this finding. Again, a substantial segment of the total group had pondered some kind of significant career revision such as a move to administration or business. But a larger percentage of representative than vital professors had considered such a transition.

One may speculate from these findings that many professors occasionally feel a need to revise their work roles in order to maintain a sense of challenge and growth. These very preliminary results also seem to suggest that more representative than vital academics at some point feel locked into career roles that offer insufficient gratification or opportunities for professional renewal.

Environmental Factors

Theoretically, professors employed in the same institution or academic unit work in essentially the same environment. In principle, they enjoy many of the same professional opportunities and benefit from very similar forms of support. In reality, however, the way professors interact with their work environment and capitalize on its resources may vary greatly.

Data presented in Table 7 identify environmental factors that also distinguish vital professors from their representative counterparts. More

INSERT TABLE 7 HERE

interview participants in the former category cited environmental factors that had contributed to their success as college professors than did those in the latter group. Most noteworthy perhaps, are the different percentages that mentioned administrators' contributions to their professional success. Nearly half of the vital professors noted that administrators had helped them in some way while only 20 percent of representative professors acknowledged administrator assistance. Those who had received aid from presidents, deans, or department chairpersons cited many forms of assistance. These included funds to purchase equipment, reduced course loads, and public recognition, as well as generally warm, friendly administrator-faculty relations and a sense that administrators genuinely care about professors' work. Several professors also mentioned the special support deans and department heads had given them when they were just beginning their academic careers.

Several other external factors conducive to faculty success also distinguish vital professors from their representative colleagues. Grants for research and scholarship, support for professional development, and encouragement, recognition, and rewards were each cited by considerably larger portions of vital than representative professors. Participants mentioned a wide range of grants and fellowships that had fostered their scholarship. Sabbatical programs, teaching improvement grants, and summer seminars (such as those sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities) also stimulated some professors' growth and productivity. In addition, a

TABLE 7: Environmental Organizational, Professional Factors That Distinguish Between vital and Representative Faculty Members

	Vital		Representative		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Factors conducive to success:						
-Administrators	23	46	8	20	31	34
-Grants for research and scholarship	13	26	5	12	18	20
-Support for professional development	11	22	3	7	14	16
-Encouragement, recognition, rewards	12	24	5	12	17	19
Obstacles to success:						
-Administrators	12	24	4	10	16	18
-Working conditions, environment	20	40	7	17	27	30
Influential professional development opportunities:						
-Extended fellowships for further study (at least one semester long)	10	20	2	5	12	13
-Grants for research and scholarship	23	46	12	30	35	39
-Change of scene (faculty exchange, consulting, employment in non-academic setting, etc.)	12	24	6	15	18	20

notable number of participants identified various forms of encouragement and recognition that had enhanced their careers in some manner. A supportive comment or thoughtful note from a dean, encouragement from outside colleagues, and awards or citations for significant achievements seem to provide some faculty members with additional incentive to produce high quality work.

Surprisingly, vital professors also mentioned more obstacles to their professional success than did members of the representative group. Vital faculty more frequently cited negative working conditions, such as inadequate laboratory facilities or library collections. Professional isolation in largely rural settings was another concern some raised. Administrators were also viewed as occasional hinderances. A vital speech instructor, for example, criticized administrators who "don't understand what academics is about."

It seems ironic that highly regarded professors see more obstacles to their success than does a cross section of their colleagues. Perhaps this is due to the more diversified careers they lead. More obstacles may be visible when a person attempts to perform effectively on several fronts.

Specific information on influential professional development opportunities (Table 7) further elaborates on environmental factors that distinguish vital from representative faculty. Grants for research and scholarship, extended fellowships for further study, and changes of professional scene (including faculty exchanges, consulting, employment in non-academic settings) were each noted by larger percentages of the vital than the representative faculty groups. One may infer from these findings that vital professors, more frequently than professors in general, take advantage of professional

development opportunities and benefit from these experiences.

Faculty Goals. Findings concerning professors' goals for the next five to ten years (Table 8) may help to explain some of the differing activities and achievements of vital and representative faculty members. Professors in

INSERT TABLE 8 HERE

the vital category cited more short term professional goals than did professors in the representative group. Many vital respondents easily listed specific projects they hoped to complete within a relatively short period. Research and writing projects, such as interpreting Plato's dialects, editing assignments, zoological classifications, completing journal articles, and authoring books were mentioned most frequently. In addition, teaching related goals, departmental and institutional service, and external professional activities served as motivating factors for some study participants. New course development, designing alternative teaching strategies, setting up a campus nature center, strengthening a college's honors program, and becoming president of a national professional association are examples of the clear cut goals professors pursue.

Except for professional development objectives, more vital professors cited goals in each category than did representative professors. This difference in goals is further highlighted by data on participants with no five to ten year goals. Nearly twice as many in the representative category (30 percent) than in the vital category (16 percent) indicated they had no goals they hoped to achieve in the near future.

TABLE 8: FIVE TO TEN YEAR FACULTY GOALS

	Vital		Representative		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Research, writing, publication	32	64	19	47	51	57
Service to institution or department	9	18	2	5	11	12
Professional Development	3	6	7	17	10	11
Teaching related goals	10	20	1	2	11	12
External Professional Activities and Services	7	14	2	5	9	10
Other	3	6	5	12	8	9
No 5 to 10 Year Goals	8	16	12	30	20	22

Together, the findings on short-term goals suggest another way vital and representative colleagues differ. The former appear to have more concrete and more immediate goals than do the latter. Focused, achievable goals of this nature may serve to stimulate and direct faculty work efforts. The differing goals of vital and representative professors may explain partially what distinguishes professors in the two categories.

Summary and Discussion

Conclusions from exploratory qualitative research must be stated with appropriate qualifications. This study takes another step in the embryonic scholarly effort to clarify the faculty vitality phenomenon. At this stage, however, it is premature to make firm judgements concerning factors that promote vital academic careers. However, interesting trends in the data provoke informed speculation that is worthy of discussion and further investigation.

This study demonstrates that professors in general have much in common. They share many of the same professional values and enage in many similar activities. In several respects, academic life at the same type of institution is a uniform experience. Nevertheless, numerous individual, professional, and environmental factors seem to distinguish colleges' most dynamic and valued senior professors from a representative sample of their peers. This study provides evidence that vital professors have more defined, concrete goals than their representative counterparts. Vital faculty, on the average, work more hours and distribute more of their time among non-teaching activities than do representative faculty. Numerous findings suggest that vital professors have more complex, multidimensional careers than other

professors. A smaller portion of vital academics' time and energy is devoted to the teaching process. Hence, these individuals have access to more sources of professional stimulation and achievement.

Similarly, the findings indicate that vital professors have more fluid careers than their colleagues. Often their professional lives are peppered with risk-taking and innovation, role change, and other stimulating forms of career development.

It appears that vital professors are also more enterprising than their representative counterparts. They seem to take fuller advantage of opportunities available in their immediate and extended work environments. Furthermore, some seem to seek out external resources and identify professional growth options more effectively than do other professors.

Vital professors, more than their colleagues in general, also view supportive administrators as important components of their work environment. Deans and department chairs who are willing to alter work assignments, locate needed resources, and recognize significant faculty achievements appear to be another important element associated with faculty vitality.

In sum, this study demonstrates that faculty vitality is a discriminating concept that has practical utility. The vital professors in the sample are, for the most part, dynamic individuals who enjoy the benefits of an environment offering many challenging opportunities. They compare favorably with the "moving" workers Kanter (1977; 1979) describes. In contrast, many members of the representative group exhibit symptoms of the career plateau.

The findings indicate that vital professors live lives that are qualitatively different from their colleagues'. One might argue that vital

professors are inherently different people. They may be more intelligent, creative, industrious, or just better organized than less vigorous professors. Perhaps vital faculty would perform effectively in almost any academic environment. Indeed, research (see Creswell, 1985) suggests that basic psychological characteristics distinguish prolific researchers from less productive scholars. Dimensions of this "nature-nurture" issue should be addressed in future faculty vitality research. However, the main finding of this study should not be obscured by remaining research questions.

Implications for Policy and Practice

It seems safe to conclude that numerous extrinsic factors separate colleges and universities most treasured faculty members from those who are competent but may not function at their full potential. Knowledge of these factors can be employed to promote vitality among college professors in general.

The findings of this study suggest several steps colleges take to promote vitality:

1) Foster diversified academic careers. Colleges should encourage professors to develop professionally, to expand their interests, and to maintain a sense of progression in their work lives.
2) Encourage career planning. Institutions should ask faculty members to assess their professional lives periodically and develop goals that can energize and direct their career activities.
3) Facilitate faculty collaboration, risk-taking, and role change. Colleges that recognize the benefits of dynamic academic careers will help professors to experiment, to work cooperatively, or occasionally to alter their roles and responsibilities.

4) Employ academic personnel policies flexibly. Vital faculty seem to carve out distinctive career paths. Flexible policies are necessary to enable talented professionals to pursue their goals.

5) Recognize and reward professors' achievements. The short academic career ladder offers few extrinsic indicators of professional achievement and progress. Awards, citations, and other forms of recognition confirm that professors' efforts are valued. Symbols of merit can foster vitality by reinforcing high quality work by professors.

6) Train deans and department chairpersons to work as faculty developers. This study suggests that administrators play an important role in fostering faculty vitality. They should be better trained to perform this responsibility.

Implications for Future Research

Exploratory studies such as this one have begun to identify major variables associated with faculty vitality. Due to the contextual nature of the faculty vitality phenomenon, this type of research needs to be conducted in additional higher education settings. Community colleges, comprehensive colleges, and regional universities, would offer fertile territory for further faculty vitality research. Likewise, close examination of the connection between faculty vitality and distinctive academic cultures (individual institutions, disciplinary fields) would be profitable.

It is also time to begin examining more systematically the variables that exploratory research has associated with faculty vitality. More structured and in-depth studies of these variables may now prove fruitful.

The faculty-administrator relationship, faculty collaboration practices, effective professional development strategies and academic role change patterns are just a few of the vitality-related variables that empirical research can help to clarify.

REFERENCES

Bardwick, Judith M. The Plateauing Trap. New York: American Management Association, 1986.

Bowen, Howard R. and Schuster, Jack H. American Professors: A National Resource Imperiled. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Boyer, Ernest L. College: The Undergraduate Experience in America. New York: Harper and Row, 1987.

Clark, Shirley M., Boyer, Carol M., and Corcoran, Mary. "Faculty and Institutional Vitality in Higher Education." In Shirley M. Clark and Darrell R. Lewis (Eds.), Faculty Vitality and Institutional Productivity: Critical Perspectives for Higher Education. New York: Teachers College Press, 1985.

Clark, Shirley M., and Corcoran, Mary. "Individual and Organizational Contributions to Faculty Vitality: An Institutional Case Study." In Shirley M. Clark and Darrell R. Lewis (Eds.), Faculty Vitality and Institutional Productivity: Critical Perspectives for Higher Education. New York: Teachers College Press, 1985.

Creswell, John W. Faculty Research Performance: Lessons from the Sciences and the Social Sciences. Washington, D.C.: Association for the Study of Higher Education, 1985.

Finkelstein, Martin, J. The American Academic Profession: A Synthesis of Social Scientific Inquiry Since World War II. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984.

Hall, Douglas T., and Nougaim, Khalil. "An Examination of Maslow's Need Hierarchy in an Organizational Setting." Organizational Behavior and Human Performance, 1968, 3, 12-35.

Kanter, Rosabeth M. "Changing the Shape of Work: Reform in Academe." Current Issues in Higher Education, 1979, 1, 3-9.

Kanter, Rosabeth M. Men and Women of the Corporation. New York: Basic Books, 1977.

New York Times. "The Troubled Faculty." Summer Education Supplement, 1985.

Peters, Thomas J., and Waterman, Robert H. In Search of Excellence: Lessons from American's Best-Run Companies. New York: Warner Books, 1984.

Schuster, Jack H. Studying the Professoriate: Notes on Methods Used for Visiting Campuses. Claremont, California: Claremont Graduate School, 1986.

Super, Donald E. The Psychology of Careers. New York: Harper and Row, 1957.

APPENDIX

Description of a Vital Professor

A vital professor typically is an individual who challenges students academically and contributes to their overall development. Usually he participates in the governance and intellectual life of his institution and is involved in the debates of his discipline or professional field. A vital professor is curious and intellectually engaged. He enjoys the respect of his colleagues and is effective in the multiple roles of a member of the academic profession. Perhaps most significant, the vital professor grows personally and professionally throughout the academic career, continually pursuing expanded interests and acquiring new skills and knowledge. Adjectives that would apply to a vital professor include (Gardner, 1963, 1978):

enthusiastic

caring

dedicated

vigorous

creative

flexible

risk-taking

regenerative

Essentially, a vital professor is a "star performer" in those areas that his institution most prizes (Schuster, 1986). Vital professors do not fit into a single mold, however. Vitality exists in many forms. A vital professor may be a campus leader, an inspiring teacher, a prolific scholar, an excellent advisor, but he does not necessarily perform all faculty roles with equal zest or skill.